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WHAT TO DO WITH CIVILIZATION. IT IS POOR — MATERIALIZE IT

A SERMON
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What To Do With Civilization.

It Is Poor—Materialize It.

Being the fifth of a series of six sermons which seek to set forth the present status and needs of civilization as viewed by six sets of counselors.

"It is Impossible—Get Rid of It."
"It is Bad—Moralize It."
"It is Ignorant, Vulgar—Teach, Cultivate It."
"It is Ugly—Beautify It."
"It is Poor—Materialize It."
"It is Material—Spiritualize It."

What to do with Civilization.

It is Poor—Materialize It.

WE HAVE heard those who say throw it away or slip out from under it; have heard those who are most impressed with our moral shortcomings; have heard those who think we are lacking most in culture and those who tell us that our civilization is ugly and that is the trouble.

We listen now to those who say that all these previous counselors, who think it is worth saving but point out serious defects, are right. True it is we are bad, ignorant and ugly, but these all are just phases of one primary difficulty. Our world of men in general is short in morals, ideas and comeliness because it is short in the material things that make life. As flowers, birds and things in the sea draw their life from the world immediately about them, so do men, and they will have more life when they have more and better material from which to draw. This looks reasonable on the face of it; might be just the thing that we need. We come to the suggestion rather disposed in its favor. They say to us that the men we are to put together to make the better civilization must be men more generously supplied with things; must be men much more highly materialized than all previous generations. They say to us that to travel life well and arrive we need more luggage. We have to pause to take this in. We say that this may be just what is needed and a great and neglected

truth, but it is so different from what we have been taught hitherto to believe that it rather startles us. That the need of the world is the more richly supplied man is a great novelty, and we recall at once many familiar admonitions which urge just the reverse.

In order that we may have both of these diverse standards of life before us, we recall the kind of man most highly esteemed through many centuries. We go to the great literature of many countries and times, and the man held up there for our example is the man who travels with no luggage at all, or the minimum amount. We recall the distinction gained in their day and generation by men who could live in a tub, on a pillar, under a tree, in a cave or under the open sky. It was a rivalry to see who could be most dematerialized. It was a contest to see who could go through the world without touching it or living on it. It was not a contest for the best house, or the most nourishing food, or the most comfortable clothes and shoes, but a contest to see who could maintain life and keep going unhoused, unfed, uncovered and with unshod feet. Here was not a fad but a standard for life. Honor went to men, and they were rated, on the basis of the meagerness of their material surroundings.

Whatever was said, and whatever was meant by what was said, the injunction, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall put on," did seem to give sanction to the dematerialized life, independent of and superior to all material surroundings. Poverty was admitted as a present,

necessary and perpetual fact and, more than this, it was recognized as a standard and goal of life. Those to whom it did not come went out voluntarily to get it. The vow of poverty was one with the vow of chastity for those who would live life in the heights. To men even as late as the Middle Ages the well supplied life was more than bad judgment and a compromise with the best; it was a crime. Poverty was the standard and men failed in so far as they departed from it. Back of Europe was a continent and centuries of people who felt it a disgrace to be anxious about or well supplied with things. There are two kingdoms in man and in the world, they said, and all material things are on the flesh side which ought to be conquered and cast out. The real part of man, which should win, gets no help, but temptation only, from things in the world. Far from material things being a help, they are the great hindrance. The best way to imperil your life and lose it is to be well supplied. If you would have more life, get rid of things; throw them away; give them away; do anything with them so you get rid of them and keep yourself from being dragged down. In the face of all this we do have to pause a moment to take this in: "The trouble with your civilization is that you are not materialized enough." Whichever way is right, certainly the human mind was never asked to consider two theories of life more diverse.

We come as those anxious to know which emphasis is better for making people for our civilization. Here we are and here are all these people about us, many different kinds and degrees. If we had more

of some kinds, or all of some kinds, we are sure civilization would not be as good as it is. If we had more or all of other kinds we are sure it would be much better than it is. We wish less of some and more of the other kinds, so we are most concerned to know what has made all these kinds of people which we wish to get rid of or fill the world with.

Here we are. Did God make us so? It could be this way. In that first dawn of creation He who made all could have made every kind of man, and all the kinds of men since could be just children true to type, man too within the law, everything producing after its kind. The alert, industrious, competent people, and the lazy, shiftless, idle and incompetent; people of all kinds of morality, intellect, disposition and effectiveness, all could be just children in direct descent from a first creation of that kind. Those who cannot and those who will not, the Jukes and the Zeros, might be just contemporaries of the breed, the same when the pyramids were building; the same at the beginning of the race. Those who can and those who will, might be just the children of the competent and the faithful strains from the first creation. Or it could be that we were cast in the rough into the world, and the things through which we have come have ground us and pressed us into what we are. Whatever our shape, outward form, power of mind and will, or disposition, all these may be just the evidence of what things without have done to us in coming through. We find ourselves smooth and comely if the pressure has been favorable; rough, angular and unsightly if not.

This latter view is very attractive to us. Special creation and a fixed status for every kind, unchanged through all change of conditions without, were the views held almost exclusively in the world until our own time. Our world is impressed with the new facts which seem to say that as we have been environed, so we are; say we change as things about us change. Some think it is almost wholly a matter of climate, soil and topography. If we have had low temperature about us, we are industrious and self-controlled. Perpetual summer makes for shiftlessness and immorality; crime increases in summer and in warm countries. If we are cheerful, that comes from sunny skies; clouds and the dark make people gloomy, sullen and morose. So of every feature of face, curve of body and trait of disposition, it has a history; can be traced to some cause in things without. We are products of the soil. If the country about us had not been so rich; if we had lived in the desert, or on barren and stony soil, our life would be different. So of elevation, the water surrounding, mountain, plain, island and seashore, each makes people of a certain kind. These, it is said, are the hands that have moulded us. We have been pressed hard or pressed lightly; kept awake or allowed to sleep; are self-controlled or passion ruled. Every feature without, every trait within is what is it is because of climate, soil and topography.

Others, holding too that we are made by external things, object that these are too remote. All mountains do not produce William Tells; all countries with the climate, soil, elevation and proximity to the sea

of Greece, do not produce a Socrates, Plato, Aeschylus or those who can understand them. These conditions have been the same for all the Greeks since, yet her golden age does not return. Our country was just as favorable for the savage tribes through the long centuries as for us today, but they were not pressed by necessity out of their way of life into ours. Things much nearer than the sun, the mountain and the sea, it is urged now, make us what we are. The pantry, our wardrobes, the beds in which we sleep, the rooms in which we sit, the furnishings and decorations immediately about us and the view out of our windows, these near things really make us. We absorb our life so entirely from these material things closest to us that we can hold our own and increase in almost any climate, on any soil, at any elevation, if we take these things with us.

Of all the things outside which make people what they are, it is now held that food is chief. As a man eateth so is he. Progress is a matter of provisions. This, it is said, is both spring and goal of all human activity and the key to all history. Affairs of our own time and of all past times; every move of men singly and collectively; all that has been done, thought, felt and written is to be interpreted truly only in terms of food pressure. Hunger makes the world go; food is the prerequisite condition of all good, and lack, or the fear of it, the condition out of which proceeds all evil.

Those who study cause and effect invite us to look at this need of materializing men, in terms of human life. A generation or a group pressed for food is

bound; the whole existence is committed to this alone. The new generation born has to assume a part of the burden early. This shortens the period of infancy which distinguishes us from all the life about us. By the length of infancy we are rated; cutting it off shortens the very period when our advance is made. Boys become men and girls become women before their time. Duties come before the strength to do them and temptations before the character is developed to resist them, hence, follies, indiscretions and petty crimes. Early maturity brings early marriage and a new generation without the means to support it or the wisdom to direct it, hence, uncertainty of life, disorder, disruption and divorce. Given this hard pressure for food, men tell us that they can write the whole story in advance. These things will follow. Here is a law of things traced too often for any one to doubt. From this group will come most of the dependents to the Board of Charities; most of the delinquents to the Juvenile Court; most of the incorrigible to the Reform School; most of those dealt with by divorce courts, sub-normal institutions, jails and penitentiaries. Where men are not materialized enough, and food is the determining thing, all this human tangle is made.

Where are we now and whom shall we believe? On the whole the facts do seem to say that there are no fixed kinds of people coming down the years unchanged. Heredity counts for less with us and surroundings more than with men before us. Our new knowledge says that people are much more nearly alike when they come into the world than we thought.

It says that different kinds of people are not the descendants of like kinds that run all the way back; says that those who hew and draw today are not by any necessity of things the children of those who built the walls of Jerusalem and worked the fields on the Tigris and the Euphrates.

The religious insistence on the dematerialized man has lost its force in our stern world of fact. The dead hand of Orientalism has lost its grip. We are not persuaded that material things are death dealing to the things approved of God. The injunction to other-worldliness, at the expense of this, is no longer heeded as the high call to life or religion pure and undefiled. From early centuries to Piers Plowman the way out was joining the brotherhood of the poor. Poverty was a fixed status, desirable, beautiful and mysterious; it was dear to God and the mark of the elect. Souls flowered best where God's furnishings here, tempting flesh, were least. Peter's vision of the clean and unclean beasts was denied. "What God hath cleansed let no man call common or unclean." Poverty is now a disease; not something to be sought but something to be banished from the world. It has been transferred in its listing from the side of God's providence to man's iniquity. In our world, poverty and spiritual excellence are not found so invariably linked that we must conclude that they must be had together. The religious interpretation of the dematerialized life has gone with the purported facts upon which it was built.

The old scientific view of poverty seems now as inconsistent with the evidence. It held the same;

said too that it is the stern, inscrutable will of God, but called Him by another name, Nature. Poverty, it would teach us, is one of the deadly tests applied to see who are fit to live. Being poor like being sick or worsted in the fight, is the brand on those who cumber the ground and are marked for removal. To hinder its selective and beneficent working is to tamper with the process of order and advance. This is not our last word in science.

The old political economy of poverty was made for a world that it fitted. It was a world of deficit. There was not enough to go round. No intercommunication carried the excess at one point to meet the lack in another. Political economy was dividing a deficit. Some had to be left out as a mathematical necessity. People increased more rapidly than the means of life. If some got more, then others had to get less. The business of life was to be in the group that got more. It was a terrible law. We have passed to a world of surplus. The political economy of our day is dividing a surplus. Other laws have been discovered and become operative. We have within our hands the means of increasing the material things many fold. The dematerialized life by an iron law of necessity was framed for a meager world. A world of surplus, with knowledge and power to make it what we will, knows no such law.

Have we here at last the magic formula which all the world before sought and missed? More things, more life, is this the formula? Double what we have and make it twice as good. Have we here a guarantee that life will rise twice as high? Cut down all we

have to one-half the amount and make it only one-half as good, will life drop down just one-half? We are dealing here with no such exact, mathematical certainties. We are dealing here with the most illusive and complex thing, human life. It makes itself in such barrenness that we think it would surely die; it goes down amid such wealth of material advantage that we wonder how it can help from being lifted up. We see it ascending in pressing want and descending in abundance and excess.

We have our measure of life, a graduated scale, and we stand our lives up against it. The measure is in terms of spirit and will, ideas, knowledge, aspirations, conscience, generous-mindedness, tender concern for others, public spirit, character, sweetness and light, love of truth and beautiful things. These are the things by which we rate life and they have not changed. Out of all conditions of material life these qualities have come and failed to come. Along the hard and barren way, in poorest homes, schools and churches, these distinguishing marks of excellence have been found. In ways richly hedged about and provided with all the helps, they have been missed. Have we come upon a new time in which all these hitherto marks of life are superseded? Or, granted that they are still the measure, do all the ways of producing them, thought effective until now, go to the discard before this magic formula, the materialized man at last, the goal of the ages and the hope of the race?

The hard fact is that in the world in which we live man is not exempt from or without the law. Life

knows both going on and up, and going down and out. Even the most helpful and necessary things may become, through misuse or excess, weights instead of wings. Things are to be had which carry men down more rapidly, and they cost money to buy. Surround such lives with more material and they can buy more of these things. So there are two requirements: more things to buy life with and a discriminating buyer who will buy more life and not his damnation; who will buy things that lift and not millstones for his neck.

What we have discovered is not a new and magic formula for life; not a new test of human excellence or a new way to make it. The measure of life is just what it has always been and the things that help make it are just what they have always been. What we have discovered, and it is a great discovery, is the minimum quantity of material surroundings below which men on the average cannot go without cutting into life. Human resistance and resourcefulness have their limits. There is a degree of stress and meagerness which crushes more lives than it calls out. A few can come through amid any surroundings. The very dearth of helps gives that to try the soul's strength on. But for the average we know now about the degree of material surroundings below which the life disintegrates; loses its birthright and becomes a menace to itself and to all. We have learned that there is a degree of barrenness in which life does not flower but decays; the rule is that it decays.

The thing that counts now is just what has counted always. It is something inside, a spirit and a will. This is a part of man's equipment which he brings with him into the world. With this spirit and will, with little or nothing about them, strong men remove mountains and shape things without as they would have them. We have found about the condition of material surroundings in which men just as they come cannot, or do not, win life, but lose it. The reaction between inside spirit and things without is not a favorable reaction. The spirit is not aroused and the will is not equal. If aroused it is overcome and the result is not strength and character but a crushed spirit and a broken will with all that goes with them. Just the degree of material surroundings which will invariably make life, we have not discovered. The maximum amount of material things amid which men will invariably come up has never been found. No degree of outward, material conditions carries any guarantee. In all degrees of lack, sufficiency and abundance lives have come up and gone down. We have found a minimum in which so many in every thousand will fail. The results are uniform and constant. Certain conditions of life and certain kinds of life, hitherto isolated, unrelated and unexplained, are now seen paired together, cause and effect. The condition makes the kind; the quantity of things has bearing on the quality of men. This is a great contribution, and pregnant with vast consequences for us. It does not say that material is all. That is a half truth and just as partial as that which men held before: material is nothing, worse than

nothing. The discovery, without overstatement or exaggeration, is enough to bend us with guilt and overwhelm us with works of penance and restitution centuries overdue. It is a grievous thing for even one man to miss what God meant for him to get out of the world. No one can say how much it means for one man to miss his one and only chance in life here and be forced to the debit side. To lose it for lack of, and in the very midst of, that which the world could richly have supplied—futile, fruitless, needless loss. The whole race and God himself are impoverished in every one. All that things can do, let them do. What are things for, but this?